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ABSTRACT

In 1990 the Kentucky legislature passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). The law mandates the use of performance-based assessments, including portfolios in mathematics and writing. This paper presents findings of a case study of a fourth-grade classroom teacher's experiences in implementing instructional changes to help students produce writing-assessment portfolios. Data were obtained through participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. The use of writing portfolios changed the way in which the teacher viewed writing in the classroom; everything became connected in some way to writing portfolios. The teacher adapted more easily than other teachers to the changes partly because she was pursuing an advanced degree in education. She was frustrated, however, with the brief teacher-preparation time, training that focused on assessment, lack of time for student writing, and the state grading system. A conclusion is that assessment is driving instruction, as happens with standardized testing. Other issues to consider are the definitions and purposes of portfolios, student ownership, and scoring procedures. (Contains 25 references.) (LMI)

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ED 405 634

Writing Assessment Portfolios in Kentucky:

Owned by the Students or Owned by the State?

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The literature regarding writing portfolios presents two schools of thought: 1) portfolios are the creative work of students and should be used for self-evaluation and teacher evaluation of students' progress; 2) portfolios can be standardized and used to assess students on local, state, and national levels. The former views the use of portfolios in the classroom as a grass roots movement, as a transformation of classroom instruction and assessment practices. The latter sees portfolios as the new standardized test, a driving force for instructional change, imposed top down on teachers and students. This view holds that a creative work can be lifted from the classroom context and measured against standardized models. Both schools of thought suggest that ownership of the intellectual content and artifacts of the portfolios inherently resides with the students. Somewhere, caught in the middle, is the classroom teacher who must make sense of these disparate viewpoints and implement portfolios in the classroom. As the teacher does so, s/he must negotiate that implementation in terms of the needs of students, situated within the context of the school and constrained by the necessity to have students produce a specific set of documents for purposes of highstakes assessment. How does the teacher, centered in this web of student needs, highstakes assessment demands and her/his beliefs as a teacher negotiate the implementation of writing assessment portfolios in the classroom?

Assessment of learning in classrooms in the United States has been a hotly contested topic among teachers, parents, administrators and the state since scientific methods of evaluation began to be used to assess student learning in schools at the beginning of this century (Kliebard, 1988). The process of attempting to assess student learning has taken various forms, including standardized testing based on national norms and criterion testing based on material taught in the classroom. A more recent development in the assessment of classroom learning is the emphasis on authentic assessment. The move toward authentic assessment is driven by the philosophy that current standardized tests do not accurately measure the learning that occurs in a classroom (Wiggins, 1989). This philosophy also holds that, with a variety of learners and learning contexts within a school or classroom, a single instrument is not sufficient for effective assessment. Authentic assessment actively engages students in a variety of tasks that involve higher order thinking skills (Hart, 1994). These kinds of assessments range from teacher observations of students to more formalized checklists or systematic collections of students' work (Paris, Calfee, Filby, Hiebert, Pearson, Valencia, Wolf, 1992). One such systematic collection is the portfolio

While the use of portfolios in classroom settings from elementary school to college is not new, the stampede toward portfolios as an assessment tool in disciplines other than the visual and performing arts is relatively recent. The adoption of portfolios as an assessment measure has generated much confusion and debate over the nature of portfolios, why and how portfolios should be implemented, and what impact their implementation will have on instruction, teachers, children and parents. Much of the existing literature on portfolios focuses on describing ways in

which portfolios should be implemented in individual classrooms. Very few studies focus on what happens when portfolios, more specifically portfolios for purposes of highstakes assessment, become part of the writing instruction process.

Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991) in Portfolio Assessment in the Reading/Writing Classroom for instance, describe procedures for portfolio implementation and address many of the questions teachers have about using portfolios in their classrooms. The authors suggest that portfolios must reflect what is important to teachers and students and provide some general guidelines including: 1) establishing student ownership, 2) saving work samples, 3) sharing with peers while reflecting on reading and writing, 4) encouraging students to make self-evaluative statements, 5) reviewing portfolios, and 6) conferencing about portfolios.

Consistently, the literature regarding portfolios emphasizes the importance of student ownership (Tierney, et al., 1991). Students, in collaboration with the teacher, should establish guidelines for classroom portfolios at the beginning of the school year (Jongsma, 1989; Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991; Tierney, et al., 1991). Once portfolios are part of instructional practice, ownership can be reinforced by giving students ready access to their portfolios (D'Aoust, 1992; Jongsma, 1989; Tierney et al., 1991; Valencia, 1990). Students should also assume responsibility for the maintenance and organization of the portfolios and their contents (Jongsma, 1989; Tierney et al., 1991). Finally, students' intellectual ownership of portfolio contents should be respected, affording students the right to determine who, other than the classroom teacher, has the right to read their work (Tierney, et al., 1991).

The ownership issue is underscored even in instances where portfolios are implemented for purposes of assessment. One of the attributes and dimensions built into the framework for the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) is that of student ownership (Paris et al., 1992). In the KEEP portfolios, designed to assess a broad range of aspects of literacy, student ownership is measured in two areas: interests and habits of self-assessment of student writing.

There is general agreement that different students should have different materials in their portfolios, that these materials should be collected over time and that the materials should reflect the curriculum goals of the classroom, as well as being of personal significance to the students (D'Aoust, 1992; Gentile, 1992; Hiebert, 1991; Tierney et al., 1991; Yancey, 1992). Beyond this, however, there is less agreement regarding the contents of portfolios. The literature does suggest that a best piece should be included with some kind of self-evaluative statement from the student (D'Aoust, 1992; Lamme & Hysmith, 1991; Tierney et al., 1991; Yancey, 1992).

There is also general agreement regarding the importance of teachers choosing to use portfolios in the classroom rather than having portfolios mandated by a school system or district. Tierney et al. (1991) commented that, when districts introduced the portfolio system, teachers viewed it as an encumbrance. Yancey (1992) suggests that portfolios work best when teacher

participation is voluntary and teachers design their own programs which include portfolios as an instructional strategy.

Lamme and Hysmith (1991) suggest that, even in situations where teachers were an integral part of the portfolio program design, there were varying responses to portfolio implementation and assessment. Teachers at Blackburn School, a prekindergarten through grade two school in Florida, were instrumental in trying to change the ways students were assessed. Part of this change was the implementation of portfolio assessment. After a year, during which the teachers were to have begun portfolio assessment of some type in the classroom, each teacher completed a questionnaire and was interviewed. Based on their responses to the questionnaire and interview, the teachers were ranked on a scale of involvement with portfolio assessment from first stage (non-use) to fifth stage (full implementation). Only teachers at higher levels of implementation, fourth and fifth stages, were using the types of activities and strategies described previously in this paper. These teachers saw the purpose of portfolios as informing instruction, helping students to assess their growth, and providing a means for celebrating good work.

Further, Lamme & Hysmith (1991) also reported that teachers in the second stage of the rankings had no child input in the process of establishing the portfolios and viewed the contents as collections of children's tests and assigned writings rather than as evidence of a child's progress collected over time. Teachers at the second and third stages saw the purposes of portfolios as an extended skills assessment and a way to determine promotion or retention, rather than as formative in nature. Even though teachers at Blackburn School had voluntarily adopted portfolio assessment, many had difficulty accepting the philosophy that undergirds portfolio implementation and, therefore, implemented portfolios in distorted ways or not at all.

Lucas (1992) expresses concern regarding the challenges to successful implementation of portfolios as classroom practice. The author identifies three specific, interconnected areas of concern: "(1) the weakening of effect through careless imitation, (2) the failure of research to validate the pedagogy, and (3) the co-option by large-scale testing programs" (p. 3). There will be, comments Lucas, many variations on the portfolio theme as it is adapted for a range of classroom contexts. This does not concern the author. However, a top down mandate from administrators that portfolios be implemented will, the author fears, devalue portfolio pedagogy to

> a set of easily described steps so that it can be taught to and required of whole faculties of teachers in one or two inservice sessions...rather than growing organically out of the needs and curiosities and abilities of teachers who are ready to stretch themselves in a new way (Lucas, 1992, p. 4).

The author comments on what she views as "potential incompatibilities" (Lucas, 192, p. 7) between large-scale portfolio assessment for highstakes purposes and the use of portfolios in the

classroom as an instructional strategy. Lucas suggests that portfolios, with their inherently complex contents, will have to be standardized in some way for large scale assessment purposes. When this standardization occurs, the portfolio is reduced to its lowest common denominator and becomes another standardized test that must be taught to, dictating rather than reflecting curriculum. Pieces are written and collected for the assessment portfolio, directed toward an audience of scorers. This kind of pressure on the classroom teacher and students, producing a specific set of documents for purposes of highstakes assessment, is viewed by the author as short-circuiting "opportunities for students to engage in purposeful task definition, reflection, and self-evaluation" (Lucas, 1992, p. 8). The ideal, comments Lucas, is assessment that is classroom-based, intended to directly enhance learning, "with the assessment of outcomes for purposes of accountability occurring only as a by-product" (p. 9) rather than as an end in and of itself.

Lucas suggests that conclusive research regarding portfolios as pedagogy will have to be held in abeyance until portfolios "sort themselves out" (Lucas, 1992, p. 7). There are many descriptions of portfolios, used in equally different contexts, thus causing portfolios to be defined in many different ways. This might prove problematic for survey research, with portfolio interpreted in many ways by those who self-report their usage in a classroom setting, or as highstakes assessment. The author suggests that the nature of portfolios, (messy, used for many different purposes in many different contexts) is resistant to experimental research and, perhaps at this point in time, resistant to definition. Lucas proposes that research using ethnographic methods might be most helpful at this juncture; that is, research which is designed to understand portfolios and their place within the context of the classroom, rather than research that attempts to confirm portfolios as worthwhile pedagogy.

In 1990, the state of Vermont launched a pilot program that utilized portfolios as an alternative form of assessment in writing and mathematics. Teachers developed portfolio assessment as the result of a challenge issued by Rick Mills, Vermont's education commissioner, appointed to the post in 1988 (Fontana, 1995). When Mills assumed the post of education commissioner, he directed that a test, imported from Maine, be administered statewide to Vermont students to determine how effectively teachers were teaching and what students were learning. The results of the test pleased no one, especially Vermont teachers, who argued that the test failed to adequately assess their students' knowledge. Mills challenged Vermont teachers to develop a kind of assessment that would enable Vermont students and teachers to demonstrate the results of the teaching and learning taking place in their classrooms. The teachers accepted the challenge and the movement toward portfolio assessment in Vermont was launched. Vermont initiated a pilot program that utilized portfolios as an alternative form of assessment in 1990. 1991 saw the pilot program expanded statewide (Merina, 1993). In 1993, three years after its inauguration, teachers, administrators and researchers paused to take a critical look back at the

portfolio experience in an attempt to identify what went wrong with the implementation of portfolio assessment and why a project that had held such promise was generating such a storm of criticism.

For purposes of this study, comments made by classroom teachers about portfolios have proven to be of interest. Vermont-NEA President, Marlene Burke summarized the feelings of teachers regarding the statewide implementation of portfolio assessment. According to Burke, the state rushed into implementation without doing the necessary groundwork to give it an opportunity for success. Some teachers found themselves designing portfolios without any training. Burke stated that all educators must receive essential training before implementation. Sufficient time for training trainers, and then transmitting that training to classroom teachers must be built into the overall implementation plan (Merina, 1993). Research conducted by the Rand Team in 1993 on the Vermont project ("Reform around us," 1993) suggested that Vermont teachers remained uncertain regarding competencies assessed by the portfolios and the scoring guides. Teachers who are unclear about portfolio assessment, commented the Rand Team, could have difficulty offering specific, constructive feedback to students, thus limiting the ability of portfolios to inform and improve instruction.

While Vermont was engaged in fashioning bottom-up, statewide portfolio assessment, in 1990, the Kentucky legislature passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). Unlike Vermont's grass-roots movement which originated with its classroom teachers, authentic assessment in Kentucky was to be implemented from top down, mandated by the state legislature as part of education reform, designed as the engine that would force change in classroom instruction. The authentic assessments included in the mandate were to be performance-based and those assessments included portfolios (Fontana, 1995). Teachers were expected to teach to the new performance-based tests. The following statement, taken from the Forward of Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook (Boysen, undated[1]), clearly presents the state's position on the implementation of writing portfolios in the classroom. "Portfolios are not an 'add-on' to the instructional program, instead they should be the foundation upon which the writing program is built" (p. ii). Kentucky's performance-based assessment system was also intended to be used as the basis for sanctions or rewards for individual schools (Steffy, 1993), thus moving portfolios into the arena of highstakes assessment.

In Kentucky, portfolios are used for highstakes assessment purposes in two areas: mathematics and writing. Following the research path suggested by Lucas (1992) and referred to previously, the ethnographic study reported in this paper focuses on one fourth grade classroom

[1]The Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook used in this study appears to have been prepared for the 1992-1993 academic year. A calendar of events for the 1992-1993 KIRIS Writing Assessment is listed in the document (p. 15).

teacher's experience in implementing changes in her writing instruction to help students produce state mandated writing assessment portfolios. Highstakes assessment in the state of Kentucky is inextricably bound to writing instruction in the classroom--just as the framers of KERA intended. Because of this entanglement, in order to better understand the complexities surrounding writing portfolios and their assessment, the study of writing portfolios for assessment purposes and their production must be situated within the larger context of writing instruction in the classroom.

For purposes of discussion, and to avoid confusion regarding what is meant by the terms portfolio, writing folder, and assessment portfolio, as used in Kentucky, a discussion of how the state defines each of these may prove helpful The Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook (Boysen, undated), in the body of the document, defines a writing portfolio as "a purposeful selection of student work that exhibits a student's efforts and achievement" (p. 1). This definition does not make reference to student work collected over time as generally described in the literature (D'Aoust, 1992; Gentile, 1992; Hiebert, 1991; Tierney et al., 1991; Yancey, 1992). It is the writing folder, as defined in the Definitions section of the Handbook, that appears to most closely resemble a portfolio as described in the literature (D'Aoust, 1992; Gentile, 1992; Hiebert, 1991; Lamme & Highsmith, 1991; Tierney et al., 1991; Yancey, 1992).

> writing folder--a collection of student's work in which the student can see evidence of growth in writing. It must include dated samples that address a variety of writing tasks and allow students and teachers to use past writing experiences as teaching tools for current and projected instruction. Most often this folder contains all drafts of a piece of writing. On a regular basis, the student needs to review and reflect on what has been placed in the folder in order to make decisions about what to keep for further development. The writing folder is a springboard for the generation of possible portfolio entries (Boysen, undated, p. 26).

The definition for assessment portfolio describes the artifact students and teachers are required to produce for state accountability purposes and briefly sketches the process of the state mandated writing portfolio.

> assessment portfolio--a selection of student's work that represents his/her best efforts including evidence that the student has evaluated the quality of his/her own work and growth as a writer. The student, in conferences teachers, chooses the entries for this portfolio from the writing folder which should contain several drafts of the required pieces. Ideally, the writings will grow naturally out of instruction rather than being created solely for the portfolio (Boysen, undated, p. 21).

The Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook (Boysen, undated), was initially distributed to teachers in 1992. For the first time in a widely disseminated published document, statements were made regarding the philosophical underpinnings for the implementation of the writing process in classrooms throughout the state. The document also contains guidelines for writing assessment portfolio contents for grades four, eight and twelve. Grade four writing assessment portfolio requirements are listed as: a table of contents; a personal narrative; a poem, play or script, or a piece of fiction; a piece of writing that supports a position, idea or opinion, or tells about a problem and presents a solution, or informs; a piece of writing that is content area based from a disciplinary area other than English or Language Arts; a best piece; and a letter to the reviewer by the student that discusses the best piece and is self-reflective regarding the student's growth as a writer. The Handbook details benchmarks for scoring writing assessment portfolios, a self-assessment form for student authors and three page directive entitled "Using the Writing Process" (Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook, Boysen, undated, p. 2).

This section of the Handbook gives specific instructions to teachers in what is essentially a step-by-step, linear format for implementing the writing process in the classroom. It is very much a "how-to" document, the set of "easily described steps" about which Lucas expressed concern (1992, p. 4). The stages of the writing process are delineated: prewriting stage, drafting, conference, revision, editing and publish. Each stage is briefly described, followed by a bulleted list of directive statements, usually couched in terms of what teachers"should" or "may" do during the course of writing process instruction. The choice of the words, "should" and "may" would seem to indicate that, in instances where "should" is used to begin the directive statement, teachers are to assume that this is a required way of operating, something they must do. Where "may" is used to begin the directive statement, teachers are to assume that this way of operating is left to their discretion; teachers may choose whether they will incorporate the directive into their classroom instruction.

Prewriting, the first stage, explains the document, enables "every student to become an independent generator of ideas" (Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook, Boysen, undated, p. 2). To accomplish this, teachers are told that they may select from a number possible strategies: whole class instruction, brainstorming, labs, field, trips, class discussions and similar kinds of activities. The document directs that the student, not the teacher, will choose the kinds of prewriting strategies that are best suited to the individual student's needs. Teachers are given the option (a "may" directive) of allowing students to select topics of their choice, or providing "particular topic components" (p. 2) that leave some choices open to the student, and that do not "deprive students of...ownership of their writing" (p. 2). The document does not offer teachers any insight as to why this stage is important to the student's growth as a writer, or as to how this

stage of the writing process might evolve organically from the broader context of classroom instruction in content area.

The drafting stage of the writing process, according to the document, requires students to use a "deeper level of thinking than do prewriting activities" (p. 2). Teachers are directed with a "should" statements that they are to create an environment in the classroom that provides support for different student learning styles, provides students with an extensive variety of resources, and allow students sufficient time for drafting purposes in and out of the classroom. Teachers are further directed to respect the student author's competence with regard to making choices regarding elements of the writing, such as form, content, and audience, and to "refrain from setting artificial limits or constraints upon these areas" (p. 2).

According to the document, conferences are intended to provide student writers with feedback from teachers and peers regarding their writing. Those giving feedback are given very specific guidelines as to the kind of feedback and how the feedback process is to take place ("question rather than dictate; coach rather than correct, model rather than rewrite, etc." p. 2). The document states that the final decision of what to accept or reject in the way of feedback, and determining what to incorporate into the writing is the decision of the student.

The document describes the next stage, revision, as integral to the writing process. A general guideline is given that students will decide what kinds of changes, additions and deletions they will be integrated into their finished work. Again, the focus appears to be on what teachers "should" do to implement the revision process without providing a theoretical framework as to why teachers should consider revision as integral part of the overall writing process, or why revision should be carried out in a particular way. Teachers are told that they "should raise questions to clarify the student's purpose, approach, meaning, content, ideas, organization, etc." (p. 3). Again, any discussion of the underlying pedagogy related to what is presented as an integral part of the writing process is absent. Nowhere in this section are teachers given an indication as to the reasons why students should be encouraged to discuss their writing in ways that assist them in thinking about thinking--acquiring a richer understanding of the organization, content, purpose and meaning of their writing and the process that produced the written product.

During the editing process, the next stage described in the document, teachers are to focus on the role of students as owners of their writing: "teachers will emphasize the role of students as owners of their work" (Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook, Boysen, undated, p. 3). Editing is intended to assist students in the production of the "best possible paper according to his or developmental level" (p. 3). No suggestions are given to teachers regarding strategies for supporting and ensuring student ownership. During the editing process teachers are to support students in the practice of self-assessment while monitoring their work and attending to surface features (punctuation, grammar, spelling, etc.) Teachers are directed that students may use

thesauri, dictionaries, or word processing programs that incorporate these tools to help them manage surface feature elements of their writing. At no time are teachers permitted to assume authorship of student work, or make direct corrections. The subtle nuances of the differences between coopting and coaching or editing by the teacher are not addressed. Again the what to do, or what not to do, is the focal point of the directive, rather than the how to do it and do it well and, of equal import, this is why you are doing it. Once again, where is an indication of the pedagogy that supports the directive.

The final stage of the writing process as described in the Handbook is publishing. Each student is required to publish a minimum of six specific pieces of writing and the publishing act becomes official when students "choose to include them [the six pieces of writing] in their writing assessment portfolios" (Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook, Boysen, undated, p. 4). Interestingly, it is at this point that a shift occurs, with the directives being aimed primarily at the student authors rather than their classroom teachers. From teachers "should" and teachers "may" the directives move to students "must" and students "may".

Students are told that "many forms of publishing are acceptable (bound books, pamphlets, brochures, illustrated works, regular manuscripts)", a seemingly wide array of options that allow students to exercise their creativity. However, the need for a standardized format intrudes, subtlety limiting student choices. The work, it seems, "should be a size that will fit the standard writing assessment portfolio" (p. 4). Published student works (those selected for inclusion in the assessment portfolio) are to be neat and legible, with word processing an accepted method of production.

The last bulleted statement addresses the issue of student ownership of both the intellectual content of the writing assessment portfolio and the compiled artifact: "student authors must first give their permission before any writing can be published for any purpose outside that of portfolio assessment" (p. 4). This statement implies that students are the owners of their portfolios, both as intellectual property and as artifacts. If students' rights as owners of their writing assessment portfolios is to be respected, as suggested by Tierney et al. (1991), and that as a result of this ownership, only the students have the right to determine who, outside of the classroom teacher, has the right to have access to and/or read their work, is the state then coopting the students' rights of ownership when it exempts itself from being aligned with those who must request the students' permission for access? The state publicly acknowledges the student authors as owners of their work when it declares that other individuals and agencies who wish to use or have access to the writing assessment portfolios must first obtain student permission. The state asks student authors to sign a release permitting their portfolios to be copied for teacher and scorer training purposes, assigning itself the role of protector of the rights of its younger and less powerful citizens. Does the bipolar stance assumed by the state go to the

heart of the ownership issue? Why is student work considered by the state to have been "published" only when that work is selected for inclusion in the state mandated writing assessment portfolio? Why is only the state exempt from obtaining the student owner's permission to access and read the portfolio's contents? Is the writing process, presented to teachers as a linear instructional model, culminating in student selection of pieces for "publication" in the writing assessment portfolio driven by the learning needs of the students, or the high stakes assessment needs of the state? How does the classroom teacher implement the writing process in the classroom? Who owns the writing assessment portfolios, the students or the state?

Establishing a Frame of Reference

I initially became interested in portfolio assessment during a research course in graduate school in the fall of 1993. The research project for the course was to be collaborative.[2] A fellow doctoral student, Susan Gooden, had previously completed a study regarding the strategies teachers were using to implement portfolios in classrooms in Kentucky. Susan was interested in pursuing questions that had emerged from her previous research. When Susan described her project to the class members, I expressed interest in her research and agreed to team with her. Working together on the project would enable us to carry out the research in two classrooms located in different school districts and to explore the differences and similarities in the ways the classroom teachers implemented portfolios in their classroom (Esser & Gooden, 1993).

Since my most recent professional experience was as a school library and information specialist, I came to the classroom with no personal experience in implementing writing portfolios. I had, however, spent considerable time doing background reading on portfolios. It was soon obvious that my background reading operated as binoculars--focusing on some details to the exclusion of others. I found myself looking for signs of student ownership as described in the literature, expecting that these signs would be purposefully orchestrated by the classroom teacher. It soon became apparent, however, that this focus blinded me to the teacher's perceptions of her choices as matters of expedience rather than some overriding plan to give students ownership of their work.

For example, one of the practices established by the teacher for handling the organization of the writing portfolios in the classroom (separate writing folders for work in process and for completed work) was not some grand plan to give students ownership, but a matter of expediency for teacher and students. It was the obvious way to organize the classroom portfolios to facilitate student access and paperwork management. Initially then, I interpreted what I saw with tunnel

[2] S. Gooden continued her research on student ownership of writing assessment portfolios focusing on the students' perspectives. The results were presented at the National Reading Conference in San Diego, CA in 1994.

vision rather than with eyes open to recording actions and interactions as events with multiple meanings. Ongoing discussions with Susan regarding the data we had collected during the observations alerted me to my rather myopic way of looking at the activities in the classroom. I began to observe with a more consciously open framework, rather than looking for examples that supported what I had read in the literature.

As the observations progressed during the fall semester, overriding themes began to emerge from both classrooms. The literature regarding portfolios consistently emphasizes the importance of student ownership as discussed previously in this paper. Public documents produced by the Kentucky Department of Education appear to support student ownership of portfolio contents. The Kentucky Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook (Boysen, undated), distributed by the Kentucky Department of Education, clearly describes the state's public position regarding the ownership issue:

> Since students must have total ownership of their writing, any intervention from teachers, peers, and/or others should enhance rather than remove or diminish that ownership and should be offered in the spirit of helping students re-assess their own work...The KIRIS [Kentucky Instructional Results Information System] Writing Portfolio Assessment acknowledges the students as sole creators, authors, and owners of their work (Boysen, undated, p. 1).

However, Susan and I found a dissonance between the philosophy of ownership as described in the literature and echoed by the published documents of the Kentucky Department of Education and the implementation of writing portfolios as highstakes assessment. Intertwined with the issue of student ownership were the issues of teacher beliefs and the effects of prior knowledge on the ways the teachers implemented portfolios in their classrooms.

Susan and I completed the research project for the fall semester, concluding that our findings were tentative and based on very limited data. During the spring 1994 semester, another research course afforded an opportunity to explore some of the issues that had emerged during the fall project. For the spring semester course, the research projects were to be individual rather than collaborative.[2] During the fall semester, I had observed and participated in the writing process as it was structured in a fourth grade language arts classroom. The teacher had frequently mentioned, and occasionally discussed at some length, her determination that her students have the right to choose the pieces to be included in their writing assessment portfolios. She regarded this as a pivotal ownership issue for her students. The teacher also commented several times in conversation that, if her school's scores did not increase, the school would be declared "in crisis" with far reaching negative implications for the faculty, staff, administrator and students.

I felt that my project from the fall semester was incomplete, somehow unfinished. Here was the opportunity to go back into the same classroom and see the project through to its appropriate conclusion--the writing assessment portfolio conferences. I wanted to know how the classroom teacher would continue to negotiate the implementation of highstakes writing assessment portfolios in her classroom within the larger context of writing instruction as the due date for the completion of the writing assessment portfolios drew nearer. When the time came for the students to choose the pieces that were to be included in their writing assessment portfolios, would they be given the freedom of choice as described as in the literature and the published documents of the Kentucky Department of Education be, or would their right to choose be coopted by the teacher who was very aware of the needs of the school to increase scores on the portfolios? What would the teacher/student portfolio conferences look like? How would she negotiate the delicate issue of student ownership?

Research Procedures

Data.

Data was collected from one classroom teacher, identified in this paper as Sarah Warren,[3] who teaches language arts to all fourth grade students at Cedar Ridge Elementary School, an urban Kentucky school. The study focused on Sarah's homeroom class of twenty-five students, thirteen males and twelve females. Sixty-seven percent of the children in the homeroom class were Anglo-European; thirty-three percent were African-American. Many of the children came from single parent homes. Some lived with care givers other than parents--aunts, grandparents or foster parents. Eighty-four percent of the Cedar Ridge student body was eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Methods.

Three methods of data collection were used: participant observation, interviews and document analysis. Observations of Sarah's homeroom during Language Arts class periods were carried out three to four mornings each week from October 11, 1993, through March 12, 1994, when Sarah completed individual teacher/student portfolio conferences. In some instances, the fourth grade team of teachers agreed to reschedule class periods so that they could have a longer period of time to work with students on an extended project or the assessment portfolios. When this occurred, I adjusted my schedule accordingly to continue the observations.

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[3] Permission was given by the teacher to use her first name. The last name is used for the teacher throughout this report is a pseudonym.

Sarah introduced me to her students as another doctoral student, like herself. (At the time of this study, Sarah was in the process of writing her dissertation for the completion of her Doctorate in Education Leadership.) Initially, I limited my activities in the classroom to observation, however, as the students became accustomed to my presence, I began to walk around the classroom, observing small groups of students working together, asking questions about what they were doing. By the beginning of the second week of my observations, I had become part of the classroom routine and found myself assisting students with various aspects of the writing process.

I interviewed Sarah formally three times during the course of the research study. These interviews were semi-structured and I used the interviews as an opportunity to raise specific questions related to themes and questions that emerged from the daily observations and informal conversations that I carried on with Sarah and her students.

I spoke and interacted with the students,[4] but did not formally interview them. I did obtain written permission from twelve of the students and their care givers to audiotape the one-to-one conference sessions that Sarah holds with each of her students to select writing pieces for inclusion in the writing assessment portfolio. I was an observer at all of the student/teacher conferences with the students' permission.

During my observations, I had access to students' working portfolios (with student permission) and public documents that Sarah received from the school district and state regarding the writing assessment portfolios. I also collected additional public documents disseminated by the Kentucky Department of Education (training manuals, minutes from meetings of the Kentucky Board of Education) and analyzed the contents to better understand the relationship of highstakes assessment in Kentucky to classroom instruction and to identify the stakeholders in the highstakes assessment process. These documents were also analyzed to identify statements relating to student ownership of the contents of the writing assessment portfolios.

The Writing Process in Sarah's Classroom

Sarah Warren is a tall (5'11"), energetic dynamo with fifteen years of classroom teaching experience. She maintains an almost constant conversation with her students. This provides the children with a rich oral language environment, the key to facility with the written word. She describes items in the classroom environment; compliments students on clothing, hairstyles, behavior, school attendance and exchanges anecdotes about personal experiences and families. Cindy walks into the classroom sporting a pair of bright orange tights with tiny black bats woven into the fabric. "Cindy, those are really special tights," comments Sarah. "Did your mother get

[4]Student names used in this report are pseudonyms.

them for you?" Cindy replies, "Yes," and then relates the story of the shopping trip with her mother that resulted in the purchase of the tights. Sarah responds to the student's need to share the event by putting down the work she's has been doing and concentrating her full attention on Cindy. "What are those on your tights, bats or ghosts?" asks Sarah. "Bats!" Cindy replies. "What do you know about bats?" asks Sarah. Cindy share her rather limited store of information on the subject of bats with her teacher. "That's interesting," comments Sarah. "Where do you think you might find out more about bats?" Cindy suggests several classroom resources and a trip to the school library. "Why don't you see what else you can find out and tell me about it later?" suggests Sarah. A conversation about bright orange tights has evolved into a mini-lesson on bats and encouraged further independent exploration of the subject on the student's part.

It is 8:55 a.m. at Cedar Ridge Elementary School. The bell rings and the formal daily routine in Sarah's fourth grade classroom begins. Without prompting, the children stand straight and tall, place their hands on their hearts and face the American flag in the left corner of the room. Their teacher follows suite. Over the intercom, the recorded voice of Whitney Houston sings the Star-Spangled Banner. A few wavering voices blend with Whitney's. After the singing of the national anthem, a student leads the school in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. The upbeat principal, Mr. Johnson, makes morning announcements and takes the opportunity to encourage the children to have a good day, to think and "to know that if you think you can do it, you can."

Sarah takes class attendance for her homeroom and rewards those present with a smiley face sticker to add to the motivation chart located on a bulletin board at the back of the room. Daily attendance is a problem for some of the children and hinders their academic progress, thus the motivation chart. The turnover rate for students at Cedar Ridge is fairly high, particularly toward the end of the month. This notes Sarah, bears a relationship to the due date for rent. There was one year, she commented, when one-half of the students in her class had transferred out by January.

Sarah sees each of her students coming to school with a biography of lived experiences. She feels that these experiences provide both context and content out of which students operate, and that their classroom learning experiences should be structured in ways that make connections to their lived experiences. She purposefully devotes the first two days of each new academic year to learning about the students in her classroom. Sarah believes that she has to take time to make and nurture connections with her students because what happens in their lives outside of school directly impacts school performance and self-esteem. Sarah says she doesn't see how anyone can teach a child without knowing about that child and what that child faces everyday. "The first thing I do is find out about the child," she explains. On the first day of school, a letter is sent home to each care giver, affording the adult(s) in the child's life an opportunity to share those things that they feel are special or significant about the child. The students engage in similar

activities in the classroom, writing to their new teacher about themselves, drawing pictures of themselves and their families. Sarah assures both parents and students that what they choose to share will be held in confidence. She says she can accomplish in two days what it used to take months for her to discover about her students. During the school year, individual students in the class are taken "out to lunch" in the cafeteria by Sarah on a rotating basis. She sits with the child at a special table and spends lunch time chatting with the student. Each time Sarah takes one of her students "out to lunch," she brings a special treat from home to share.

Each child maintains a stenographer's notebook to be used as a journal. Journal entries are not part of the writing portfolio, rather the journals provide a vehicle for one-on-one, private communication between student and teacher. The students can write to Sarah about any topic, or address any concerns that they might have. Occasionally, a writing prompt is given as a suggested starting point, but students have the option to write on a topic of their choice. Again, the students are assured of confidentiality. Reading each journal, Sarah responds in writing to the students' concerns and questions. This year, however, the journals have become a source of frustration for Sarah. "We just don't seem to have time to write in them. There is so much other writing to do for the portfolios," she comments.

The classroom is a comfortable, welcoming place designed with the business of learning in mind. Bright, primary colors predominate in backgrounds and motivation charts. A poster captioned We the People of the Classroom holds a place of prominence in the center of the right-front bulletin board. In simple language, it sets forth the rights of each student to be treated fairly, to be safe, to hear and be heard, to learn and to be themselves. Students' portraits of their families and the squirmy squiggles of Scribble Art, a random flow of interconnected, multi-colored, curved lines that crisscross their way over a sheet of drawing paper, are intermingled with the more formal charts. The students' desks are aligned in a U-shape. Sarah's desk is pushed into the left-front corner of the classroom where it operates as a surface during the school day to hold student papers and a canister containing student computer diskette copies of completed and in process portfolio pieces.

In early October, fourth grade students are involved in a thematic unit centering on their home state of Kentucky, typical of the kinds of instructional units that were implemented during the period of time I observed and participated in the activities in Sarah's classroom. The interdisciplinary Kentucky unit has been developed by the fourth grade teaching team during level meetings. Activities, linked to academic expectations, are embedded in the unit which will span a six week time period and culminate with a field trip to Fort Harrod, Kentucky. Part of the thematic study deals with traditional crafts. During the previous week, the mathematics teacher has completed mini-lessons on geometric shapes, with the students using brightly colored geometric pieces of tagboard to design a quilt block that has been glued to a 9-inch square of

black construction paper. Sarah has structured the spelling lesson to include the terms for the geometric shapes that the children have been studying in mathematics: triangle, rhombus, trapezoid, square, circle. In language arts, coinciding with the math activities, Sarah has been reading books about quilts and quilting to her students. They have also had several opportunities to examine quilts that Sarah has brought into the classroom.

On this particular morning, the students are ready to begin writing about their "quilt piece". Sarah explains to the children that they are carrying on the tradition of quilt making with the quilt squares they have created. During the trip to Fort Harrod, the children will see men and women dressed in the clothes of the late 1700s, and some of the women will be quilting. Sarah reminds the children of a book she read to the class about quilts, that every quilt pattern has a name and a story behind the name. Briefly, she reviews the steps used in the writing process using a neatly lettered poster mounted on a classroom wall as a guide: 1) brainstorm, 2) outline ("It's like your blueprint or recipe," she tells the class.), 3) first draft, 4) edit with an adult or another child, 5) publish. This approach generally follows that suggested by Calkins (1986) and also delineated in the Kentucky Writing Portfolios Teacher's Handbook (Boysen, undated). Sarah has opted to combine the steps of conferencing and editing and add outlining as an organizational step, adapting the stages described in the Handbook to her teaching style and teacher beliefs about how writers write. She explained that she has thought very carefully about how she writes, and finds that the process as she has implemented in her classroom is a fit for her personal experiences as a writer. First, she commented, she brainstorms,

> putting all of my ideas down on paper. Then I have to have some way to organize it, so I outline. By the time I've done that, its pretty well written. I'm ready to write my first draft. Then revise and rewrite.

Each student is handed a 4x6-inch index card, which Sarah refers to as "brainstorming cards". On these cards, the children are to write down "all of the ideas that come into your mind about your quilt. The more brainstorming you do, the easier it will be to come up with your outline," she comments. The children work quietly and diligently on their brainstorming, jotting down words and ideas. Frequently, the children pick up their quilt squares, turn them this way and that, examining the patterns. Sarah walks from child to child, assisting those who are struggling. "What are you going to name your quilt piece? Were you thinking of anything in particular when you made it? What does it remind you of?" The quilt pieces begin to acquire names: Rhombus, Carousel, Butterfly, Airplane, Shooting Star.

Keisha, raising her hand, reminds Sarah that she has forgotten to put the writing prompt on the chalkboard as she usually does for the class. Sarah thanks Keisha, walks to the front board and writes: "After studying Kentucky and quilting, we have learned that quilt designs have a story behind them. Tell the story of your quilt."

Some of the children have finished with their brainstorming. "If you've finished brainstorming, turn the paper [the 4x6-inch index card] over and start to outline. Outlining is putting your plan together. The outline is the plan." Using the chalkboard, Sarah demonstrates the use of Roman numerals to designate different topics. "Each number is a paragraph," she tells the children. "In your outline, you don't want to write your whole story. Use just phrases." Emily asks for help with creating her outline. Sarah walks to Emily's desk and reads what she has written.

> Okay, let's look at your brainstorming. Let's go back. What have we been studying about since the beginning of the year? When you write something, you want to tell your reader your purpose in writing this, as if they know nothing about this and don't live on this planet. Sometimes our ideas take time to get on paper. Writing doesn't happen fast. Sometimes it takes two days just to get a good paragraph.

Kimberly voices concern about the length of her quilt story. She's completed her outline and will have five paragraphs. "Five paragraphs is fine. As you write more and get more excited about your writing, your pieces will get longer."

Sarah has shared two important concepts related to writing with her students. Good writing takes time. It requires taking ideas and mulling them over, giving them time to grow. She also indicates to Kimberly that the length of the piece of writing will evolve naturally from the writer's involvement with the subject. Sarah often refers to herself as a writer, validating her students' experiences by sharing experiences of her own. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in education as is in the process of writing her dissertation. Because she is heavily engaged in writing on an almost daily basis, she reflects on the content and process of writing. This enables her to share insights about how writers write with her budding authors and gives her a special commonality with her students. When a student commented that he had been working a very long time on single paragraph, she validated his discovery that writing takes time, describing a similar experience with her writing when she had struggled with particularly frustrating paragraph for two days. She commented to the student that she had "gotten stuck on that paragraph and just couldn't make it work. Writing just takes some time and we have to learn not to be in such a hurry."

Sarah checks the students' outlines as they are completed, making suggestions and keeping up a running commentary on introductory paragraphs. After the outlines are approved, students begin writing their first drafts on loose-leaf. Steven is struggling with the precision of the words he has chosen to describe his quilt piece. Sarah assists him in clarifying concepts, helping him select descriptive words that are more precise than "nice" and "pretty". She asks Steven to take some time to rethink some of his ideas and suggests that he consult a thesaurus, located in the

classroom, for possible alternate words. Steven resolves his difficulties with word choices and begins to write his first draft. Sarah leans over Steven's shoulder to read what he has written. "That's a wonderful first sentence! It [the quilt piece] reminds you of the Ferris wheel at Kentucky Kingdom? Wonderful!" Steven beams, evidently well pleased with his progress.

Maggie raises her hand to ask for help with her outline. Sarah asks Maggie, "Where is your brainstorming?" Maggie replies that she skipped the brainstorming and went straight to the outline. "Can't do that, " comments Sarah. "It's like making a chocolate chip cookie with no ingredients." Again, the teacher emphasizes process over product to the students. She expects writing to take time.

The following day, the technicalities of spelling take priority over writing. A lesson on contractions limits writing time to ten minutes. Some of the children are ready for their first draft, some are ready for editing, others are completing the second draft. Sarah comments to the children that, rather than a class this is "more of a workshop setting because we're all in different places." As the observation days pass, the individual working pace of the various students becomes more apparent. Some have completed the quilt story and move on to begin the writing process for another story. A few will begin yet another writing piece. One child decides to go back and work on a previously completed piece to add some new ideas. Sarah frequently comments to the children that these kinds of differences are appropriate for a workshop. Each individual works at her/his own pace--some faster, some slower and others ranged in the middle. There is no pressure to hurry and complete a task, but rather to do the task well.

A few of the children have completed the final draft of their quilt stories, including entering the story into a word processor. The school has a number of Macintosh Powerbooks that can be checked out of the computer lab and taken to the classroom. Each of the students has his/her own diskette containing the student's writing pieces. The diskettes are kept in a canister on Sarah's desk with the children taking the diskettes from and returning them to the canister as needed.

Sarah reviews the steps for publishing as she has structured it in her classroom. Sarah did not connect the term, publishing, to selecting pieces for the assessment portfolio, electing to situate her form of publishing within the context of the writing workshop. For Sarah's students, publishing is an ongoing activity. There is a designated "publishing spot" in the classroom which is centered in the open end of the U-shaped arrangement of student desks. The student authors come to the publishing spot with their completed writing pieces, introduce themselves, read the title of their writing piece, then read the story. The teacher reminds the audience that it, too, has an important part to play in the publishing process--to listen. As each child complete the reading of his/her piece, Sarah asks one or two questions related to the writing.

Steven is the first author to publish his work today. Sarah asks him to pick up his quilt square design and hold it up so the class can see it as he reads his story. She comments on the unusual title he has chosen for his design and story, The Ferris Wheel. The piece is short--no more than five or six sentences and takes very little time to read. Sarah asks Steven if he has ever taken a ride on the Ferris wheel at Kentucky Kingdom. Steven gives an emphatic, "Yes" in reply. Sarah asks Steven to share his experiences with his classmates--who accompanied him, how he felt when he rode the Ferris wheel. The delighted class rapidly becomes caught up in the discussion. "They stopped it and I got stuck at the top!" says Steven. "How did you feel at the top?" queries Sarah. "Scared!" is the prompt reply. "Did you want to get back on the Ferris wheel?" asks Sarah. "How did you feel when the ride was over and you were back on the ground?" Steven shares that he felt fine after he was back on the ground, but he won't go on the Ferris wheel the next time he visits Kentucky Kingdom. Sarah suggests that Steven might want to consider using some of his feelings and experiences in a revision of his quilt story at some time in the future, or that he might want to include them in another story he writes. She also suggests that he file his quilt square with his story for inclusion in the writing assessment portfolio.

Steven files his newly published story, along with his quilt square, in the third drawer of a gunmetal gray filing cabinet. Each student has a file folder in the drawer to store finished pieces of writing and can go back and rewrite pieces at some future time during the school year if they so choose. The children also have a manila folder for "in process" pieces, stored in a royal blue, plastic file crate. Sarah refers to these as the students' "working portfolios". These pieces are in various stages of development along the writing process continuum. The crate sits on a table located at the center front of the room underneath the chalkboard. During the writing workshop, the children retrieve their folders from the crate and take them to their desks on an as needed basis. At the end of the class period, the students return their folders to the crate for safe keeping.

Sarah says that one of the things she has seen develop among the students as a result of the writing workshop is an increased willingness on their part to help each other. When working on their individual pieces, the students peer conference, depending on each other for assistance and feedback. The teacher feels the students' level of self-confidence in their ability as writers has increased because of the exchange of ideas and mutual assistance. Prior to initiating peer conferencing in the classroom, Sarah models a conferencing situation first, with herself and a student; then with herself and two students, finally making the transition to peer conferencing. Students are told to comment only on the good things they see in their conferencing partner's work and then, after the positive aspects have been discussed, talk about the ways the writing might be improved. Sarah finds the most difficult part of peer conferencing is dealing with how very negative the children can be toward each other. She believes that this is related to the negative homelife experiences of a substantial number of students. It is important, she explained,

that the children know that they are appreciated and wanted in school by their teachers; that their teachers want them to be in school every day and to be a part of the learning and activities taking place at Cedar Ridge. Sarah feels that the teachers and principal work very hard to create a positive atmosphere for the students.

Sarah believes that there are other positive aspects to the implementation of writing portfolios in the classroom. "Positive is when a child sits down and looks in composite form at all the writing they've done during the year." This opportunity comes during the student/teacher end of the year conference Sarah holds with each of the children. During the conference, the children self-evaluate the entire range of work in their fourth grade writing folders, noting changes and growth in their writing, pointing to a certain pieces as having been outstanding work. The students, feel pride in themselves as they look at all of their work and see what they have accomplished over the course of a year. In the past, each paper was sent home as assignments were completed and graded. With writing portfolios, the body of the child's work for the year remains in tact.

Over the next few months, the students in Sarah's fourth grade class continue to add pieces to their working portfolios, some grounded in content areas, others related to holidays or current events. One by one, the pieces move from the working folder to the completed works folder in the gray file cabinet. The process is time consuming. requiring more frequent adjustments in class scheduling as the due date for the writing assessment portfolios draws nearer. In mid-March, Sarah prepares to conference individually with each of her students. Prior to the conferences, she takes each student's working and completed folders and thoroughly goes through each one, making anecdotal notes regarding her observations, so that she is prepared to discuss the contents of the folder with the student.

Each teacher/student conference takes approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Sarah has chosen a day for the conferences when the itinerant art teacher is not in the building, affording spacious table tops to spread out the many completed and a few in process pieces from each child's folder. She also has to choose a day when a substitute teacher can take her class. One by one, the students are asked to look at and evaluate their work for the school year up to this point. Each student is asked to select a "best piece," the piece of writing that represents what s/he feels is the very best work produced thus far. The number of pieces covering the table top varies from student to student--as many as eighteen and as few as ten. The choices for "best piece" will be as varied as the authors who wrote them, ranging from ghost stories to pieces of writing that support the implementation of year round schools. What does remain constant throughout all of the conferences is Sarah's commitment to let the students determine which is the "best piece". Sarah's questions for each child are consistent, varying only slightly in phrasing, but never in intent: "Which of these pieces is my [the student's] very best work?"

It is Emily's turn to conference with Sarah. Both are seated on the same side of a long table in the art room with the contents of Emily's folders arranged in neat rows across the expanse of the table.

Sarah: Okay. Let's look and see how many pieces we've got. One, two, three, four, five, let me see--fourteen! Get out of here, Emily! That's really a lot. You did this one on a laser printer. That's a nice quality. I want you to take just a minute and look at how great you are and I want you, as you're looking at these, to think. Which of all of these pieces that I've done and, oh, I've done a very good job on all of them, haven't I? Which of these pieces represents my very, very, very best work? Okay? Now take a minute to look at that.

Emily: The school calendar.

Sarah: Let's look at this. This is your opinion piece. Do you want to read it?

Emily reads the piece she has selected as her "best piece" out of the many options available to her. She reads the entire piece out loud for Sarah.

Sarah: What do you think makes this your best piece?

Emily: Because we work so hard and stuff and then we can always have vacation.

Sarah: So, you think the content of it, or what you wrote about, or your writing style?

Emily: I think the words I did.

Sarah: The words you put in. Yes?

Emily: Nods in the affirmative.

Sarah notes Emily's choice for "best piece" on the inside front of Emily's "in process" folder. She tells Emily that her choice can change since she still has two pieces that are currently being completed, one on leprechauns and another on famous black Americans from the social studies content area. Emily might prefer to use one of those as her "best piece" and, if so, that is her choice.

Sarah believes that it is absolutely essential that the students have the freedom to choose the pieces to be included in their portfolios. She stated that she doesn't always agree with the children's choices and might ask them if they were certain that a particular piece was their very best work but, ultimately, the decision of what to include must rest with the student--not the teacher. "No child," comments Sarah, "should be put in the position of writing a letter to the reviewer about a best piece that they don't really believe is their best piece. What are they supposed to do? Write a letter to the reviewer that states, 'I put this piece in here because my teacher made me?' It has to be theirs," she stated.

Although Sarah's comments implied that she might question her students' choice of best piece, during the student/teacher conferences, she did not suggest to any of her students that they should reconsider the piece selected as the best representation of their work for the year. She

seemed comfortable with their choices, or perhaps her teacher beliefs about what was right and proper with regard to coopting her students' choices. For Sarah, this was an issue of personal and professional ethics. She felt she had a moral responsibility to her students to not put them in the position of falsifying the letter to the reviewer, stating that they believed a piece was their best work when, in fact, quite the opposite was the true.

It is the end of March and at last the writing assessment portfolios are completed. The pieces have been chosen, letters to the reviewers written, the students selections copied and placed into the tri-folders sent by the state. The originals of the students' work will go to the school district's central office for storage. Since all of the students' work is on diskette, Sarah prints out an additional copy of each portfolio for the students' to share with their care givers. The children will also have the diskette copy of their work. Sarah encourages them to revisit some of their pieces in the coming school year, telling them that no piece of writing is ever really finished. There is always room for improvement, or a new idea or viewpoint to add.

Sarah's interactive approach to teaching writing encourages and supports her students in their creative endeavors and, ultimately, in the production of their writing assessment portfolios. Each child's work is respected and valued as an expression of that student's ideas and feelings. In this fourth grade classroom, the students and teacher are actively engaged in the writing process, becoming writers who share their learning about writing with each other and evidencing at least a part of what they have learned to the state through writing assessment portfolios. Two closely aligned factors markedly influence the ways that teachers, like Sarah, implement writing portfolios in their classrooms. These are teachers' prior and acquired knowledge about the implementation of writing portfolios and the teachers' perception of portfolios as highstakes assessment.

The use of writing portfolios has changed the way Sarah looks at writing in the classroom. She commented that, anytime there is accountability for something, there has to be a different stress on it as part of the instructional process. Writing has always been some component of her teaching, but not to the extent currently required. Now, explains Sarah, everything is connected in some way to writing and writing portfolios. The three fourth grade teachers work together and plan thematically, so that the writing products tie into the curriculum. In pre-portfolio days, a teacher would finish a unit and administer a test. "Now," says Sarah, "we write about it."

Sarah feels that the transition away from standardized testing to holistic assessment has been very difficult for many teachers to understand and implement. She expressed her belief that she has been very fortunate to have been in school pursuing an advanced degree at the time that education reform was implemented, enabling her to adapt more easily to the new techniques and practices. Some of her colleagues have not been as successful and have experienced a great deal of difficulty making the transition. Two individuals with whom Sarah had been teaching retired in the middle of the 1992-1993 school year. A fellow teacher followed the retirees two weeks later,

handing in her resignation. Sarah explained that these colleagues were frustrated by all of the changes brought about by KERA and could not make the necessary adjustments.

Many of Sarah's comments mirror those of the Vermont teachers discussed previously in this paper (Merina, 1993). There seems to be a similar sense of frustration with the lack of teacher training and support prior to and during the implementation of portfolios. When asked what issues she wished had been addressed during in-service training for the implementation of portfolios, Sarah responded that she wished they [teachers] had been given more time to implement the portfolios. The training took place in November, and the portfolios had to be ready for assessment by March. Sarah explained that she felt, across the board, teachers were not adequately prepared.

Asked to estimate the number of hours of in-service training she has experienced with regard to writing portfolios, Sarah responded that some training sessions were full-day, with teachers being given release time from teaching responsibilities to attend the training. Including the release time and summer in-service, Sarah estimated that she had received approximately fifty hours of training. When asked whether the initial training sessions focused on portfolio assessment or on process writing instruction in the classroom, Sarah commented,

> That's my one concern. That it's all been assessment driven in-service. Assessment driven everything. Instruction. Everything. Even when we went to the training, what they gave us the first time was the holistic scoring guide and we went through that scoring guide using terms like voice and audience and terms that a lot of people didn't understand. Before we try to teach people to score a portfolio and spend all that money on that, we should have taught them to help people [students] become better writers. I feel like they needed to go back and say, okay, here are some alternative methods of the writing process, these might be what you use, because a lot of people had not taught writing. It was like they were trying to teach people to spell without giving them the alphabet. It's gotten better. Now they take time to talk about the writing process. Before it was left out. The first year, we heard nothing about the writing process.

A study conducted by Roe (1991) supports Sarah's experience and that of her counterparts in Vermont. A group of teachers of at-risk students developed portfolios in conjunction with a university supervisor during a summer program. Teachers who participated in the Roe study cited a class they took in conjunction with portfolio implementation as providing "a necessary framework for grasping the rudiments of portfolio assessment" (p. 29), as well as giving them a starting point for discussions with colleagues. These same teachers also stated that their previous teaching experiences served as a foundation for translating theoretical constructs into

practice. Professional knowledge and self-knowledge were viewed by the teachers as essential to fully implementing portfolios.

There is a disparity between Sarah's perception of the intent of KERA and its stated purpose. KERA was specifically designed to require that teachers to teach to the test in the belief that assessments that demand the use of higher-order thinking skills would generate implementation of instructional strategies promoting the development of those skills in students (Guskey, 1994). Sarah envisions KERA as moving away from teaching to the test, as "getting away from standardized tests," not as exchanging one kind of standardized test for another. As noted previously, she acknowledges that portfolio assessment has caused her to alter her instructional practices as it is designed to do. However, she also feels constrained by the requirements of the writing assessment portfolio, that virtually all student writing must revolve around its ongoing production. Students may be writing more, but they may be writing less creatively, restricted by the prescribed writing assessment portfolio guidelines.

> You know, I really do feel like when we write, everything has to be something that has to do with the portfolio and be a potential entry. So I have to think, okay, we need to work on a personal narrative, we need to work on poetry, need to get some strong opinion papers, want to make sure we've got some things from social studies and science. It's real hard for me to say to that child, "Just write. Let's write about what you're interested in."

These comments are further evidence of Sarah's frustration with the constraints of producing a specific set of documents for highstakes assessment purposes. Her concerns seem to be closely related to the number of pieces she feels the students must produce in order for them to assemble a quality writing assessment portfolio.

> It is essential to have a lot of choices in order to produce a quality portfolio. You've got to keep them writing all the time.

Sarah's frustration with the lack of time for her students to write in their journals may be related to her need to have her students produce multiple pieces of writing for each of the five required portfolio categories. During Emily's teacher/student conference, Sarah specifically noted that Emily needed more pieces "outside of language arts". While Emily had produced a more than sufficient number of pieces overall, she did not have what Sarah considered to be an adequate number of pieces to choose from in the content area category required for the fourth grade portfolio. Rather than having the option to select from a several pieces of writing for that category, Emily's choices were severely limited, possibly affecting the score given to her portfolio and, ultimately, the score earned by the school.

In this instance, the writing pieces produced by the student do not seem to be growing "naturally out of instruction rather than being created solely for the portfolio" (Boysen, undated),

but are instead causing instruction to be distorted in such a way that a writing piece can be produced for the assessment portfolio. Also, if the definitions of writing folder and assessment portfolio are carefully examined and compared, then applied to the classroom context, the writing folder, with its messiness and student work collected over time, becomes merely a holding tank for student work that has the potential for being promoted to the assessment portfolio, or published as defined by the state.

Other aspects of the writing assessment portfolio frustrate Sarah. She expresses indignation and anger on behalf of students who receive a score of Novice (Boysen, undated, p. 11), the lowest possible score for the assessment portfolio. The numerical equivalent assigned to the Novice rating is a zero. During the 1991-1992 school year, students whose IEP (Individual Education Plan) should have made them eligible for an alternative writing assessment portfolio were expected to perform at the same level as the general student population. (For the 1992-1993 assessment cycle, the IEPs had been rewritten, with separate standards for students with learning disabilities and other kinds of special needs.) Getting this group of students ready for portfolio assessment with the needed number of pieces was extremely frustrating for both teacher and student, explained Sarah. It placed the students in a situation so that, with the score of Novice being equivalent to zero, all of the hard work this group of children put into their portfolios essentially counted as nothing. Students are told that it is acceptable to be a Novice, that it means they are at the beginning and working hard to become an Apprentice (Boysen, undated, p. 11), the second writing performance level. However, it is difficult to convince a child that a zero is acceptable, and even more difficult to convince the child's parents. An incomplete portfolio and a performance level of Novice receive the same numerical equivalent. "And that," says Sarah, "is just not fair. They [the state] ought to at least give them a one. Giving them a zero is painful. All that work and I [the student] get a zero. It's just not fair."

In Kentucky, scoring of writing portfolios is multi-phased. Initially, classroom teachers score their students' portfolios using the Annotated Holistic Scoring Guide and its accompanying benchmark portfolios. To validate the classroom teachers' scoring, a sample of five portfolios is collected from each teacher and redistributed in the district for blind rescoring. Upon completion of the rescoring, Advanced Systems, the company developing the highstakes assessment program for Kentucky, conducts an analysis of the two scores for each of the selected portfolios. Theoretically, the scores should be in agreement. Scores that do not agree are considered to indicate a discrepancy and the Assessment Coordinator arranges for those teachers who are responsible to receive further training in "moderating their students' scores" (Kentucky Department of Education, 1991, p. 9).

Sarah's school follows this pattern. All of the fourth grade portfolios are pooled, with each of the fourth grade teachers having the responsibility for scoring one-third of the portfolios,

thus, each teacher scores a mix of her own students' portfolios and portfolios produced by students who are not in her homeroom. Since Sarah is the Language Arts teacher, she is responsible for the production of each student's writing assessment portfolio. Portfolios that prove difficult to score are brought to a conference session and are read by a second reader. If the two readers cannot agree upon the score, a third reader scores the portfolio and a consensus is reached. Then the validation process established by the state comes into play.

In the Roe (1991) study discussed previously in this paper, the teachers Roe surveyed expressed concern regarding the use of portfolios as a program evaluation. For the teachers in the Roe study, the program was for a one summer duration. The portfolios produced by the students were filtered, first, through the hands of the researcher and then were examined by the district's reading consultant. At the completion of the summer program, the students' classroom teachers for the forth coming academic year were to be the ultimate recipients of the portfolios. This placed the summer program teachers in what they perceived as the position of having their work undergo peer examination. Considering the widely diverse interpretations of portfolios, the program teacher felt their interpretations might not match that of the recipients. What was usually a private process (assessment of students' performance) had become public, with the summer program teachers feeling that what had begun as an assessment of others [the students] had become an assessment of themselves.

The Kentucky Department of Education has recognized a similar difficulty in the power relationships that occur when teachers score writing assessment portfolios produced by their own students or writing assessment portfolios produced by students of colleagues. The minutes of the Kentucky Board of Education (October, 1995) explain that this issue has been addressed with all of the Board's advisory groups. The Board acknowledges that there is evidence to suggest that individuals become better teachers when they are involved in the portfolio scoring process. However, "it is at the least a perceptual problem when teachers provide scores which hold consequences for themselves" (p. 3/41). A case could be made that, when Sarah and her colleagues score the writing assessment portfolios, their situation is much like that of the teachers described by Roe, with colleagues passing judgment on other colleagues' capabilities as classroom teachers.

The fact that the writing assessment portfolios are scored by classroom teachers provides some insight into Sarah's insistence that her students enter each piece of writing into the word processor. Her stated reasons were well supported and varied. Although the computer teacher provides little support or assistance in teaching students how to use Clarisworks (the word processing program), Sarah and her students negotiate the task together. She provides guidance and directions as needed, relying on the more expert of her students to help those who are less practiced with word processing their writing pieces. She has also commented that she believes all

of her students should acquire word processing skills as part of their skills for lifelong learning and future marketability in the workplace. "They are going to need to know how to use a computer when they get out of school and have to go get a job. Anything that they know will help." Use of technology for a variety of purposes is also part of Kentucky's published academic expectations for students.

Sarah has discovered that, when the students publish (read their work in front of the class) some stumble over their handwriting. Computer generated copies of their work enable the students to read more fluently, supporting the enhancement of their self-esteem. Sarah feels the students' self-esteem is further enhanced by the visual quality of the hard copy product. Each piece is corrected for spelling and most grammatical errors have been eliminated. Students are encouraged to select a font that they feel is appropriate for their story. The resulting compilation of writing pieces is neat, attractive and a source of pride for the young author.

Each student has her/his own diskette on which their writing pieces are saved. The diskette moves from grade to grade with the student. If, at a future time, a student wished to rework a piece of writing, the task of doing so would become a simple one. This strategy, explains Sarah, enables the child to retain creative and physical ownership of the contents of the writing folder and of the writing assessment portfolio. In this school district, the completed, original assessment portfolios do not stay with the student, but are stored at a central location by the school district. The portfolios, in essence, become the property of the school district and ownership is shifted from the student to the district.

Sarah's decision to use the word processor for her student's writing pieces is also driven by highstakes assessment considerations. Her personal experiences as a portfolio reviewer have influenced her determination to have her students writing assessment portfolios presented in the most positive way possible.

The original student work used in portfolios is not sent to the reviewers for evaluation. Copies of the students' portfolios are made. If a child's handwriting is very light, the portfolio entries do not copy well, resulting in a portfolio that is very difficult to read. Some students' handwriting is virtually illegible. Sarah feels that this may set up an unconscious bias on the part of the reviewer which could negatively skew the evaluation results. She is concerned that the difficulty an evaluator experiences in reading a child's work may directly affect the score the portfolio is given, therefore, she's taking no chances. All of the students' portfolios look topnotch.

In reviewing portfolios that were assessed last year, Sarah discovered that evaluators frequently made reference to spelling errors. According to scoring guidelines, spelling is considered a surface feature and, in the list of priorities, comes at the bottom. Using the word processor enables the students to utilize the spelling check function, thus eliminating most spelling

errors. This also saves Sarah time in editing the students' work and encourages the students to use the dictionary. When the spelling check tags a word as questionable, the student has to look the word up in the dictionary to determine the correct spelling.

Whether Sarah's assumptions are based on intuitiveness, perceived evaluator reactions, or are eventually supported or dismissed by research, she has drawn the conclusion that the reviewers, no matter how well trained and retrained by the Kentucky Department of Education and Advanced Systems, are people. As people, they are problematic when it comes to consistency in scoring writing assessment portfolios. In their task of reviewing, they act as readers of texts written by the student authors. This sets up a reader/text interpretive relationship. The meaning of the text is created by what the reader brings to the text. For each reader, the same text will become a different story. Therefore, two evaluators reading the same text are interpreting the student's writing in different ways. The benchmark portfolio that is given as a guide is also subject to the same variations in reader interpretation. Add to this mix the frameworks teachers bring to reading and evaluating student work. Sarah has recognized this and has adapted the preparation of her students' portfolios to meet what she perceives as the unpublished criteria that figures into the evaluation of students' products. She is doing what she can to give her students, as well as her school, every advantage in the scoring process.

Darling-Hammond (1994) suggests another issue for consideration related to highstakes assessment in Kentucky as a means of rewarding or sanctioning schools and individual teachers. This policy has been established while ignoring the reality of the scores' dependence on student populations. Changes can be induced at the district and building level by manipulation of admission, dropout and student classification numbers. Students who are essentially transient within a school district, drifting from one school to another because of the family's continual movement from one residence to another may have little to offer in the way of writing pieces to be included in as assessment portfolio, a situation faced by Sarah and discussed in this paper. This situation may be exacerbated when a student transfers from a school setting where portfolios were not an ongoing process, but were done in the two or three weeks prior to the due date for the completion of the portfolios. If this student transferred into a school that emphasized the writing process and worked diligently on writing throughout the school year, the student would bring virtually nothing to the new school in the way of a writing portfolio. Pieces for the writing portfolio would have to be produced quickly, in order to meet a deadline. In this instance, expediency would have priority over process. How could this kind of portfolio be described as anything other than an "add-on" (Boysen, undated, p. ii) rather than growing "naturally out of instruction" (p. 21), the state preferred manner for producing writing assessment portfolios.

Sarah, her fourth grade colleagues and the principal at Cedar Ridge Elementary are pulling every rabbit out of every hat they can find to produce the needed percentage increase in their

baseline scores. Cedar Ridge is in imminent danger of being declared a school in crisis after the next round of performance and portfolio assessment. In addition to process writing in the classroom, Sarah and her mathematics counterpart stay after school and work with fourteen children who have been recommended by parents for extended day, scheduled for two days each week. The two teachers and additional staff members who work in the program devote the time to working on writing and mathematics assessment portfolios with students who need individual help. Students also receive a substantial afternoon snack--"the only evening meal many of them will get," comments Sarah.

Mr. Johnson, the principal, provides a substitute once each week for Sarah and the mathematics teacher beginning with the month of November. The substitute carries on classroom instruction in place of the teachers who are released from their whole class activities in order to assist those students needing help with producing documents for their assessment portfolios. Sarah works with these individuals and small groups in the computer lab on days when the computer teacher is not scheduled to be in the building. The change in teachers is disruptive to the students who remain in the classroom, as well as to Sarah. The carefully crafted community of learners that Sarah has so carefully constructed and nurtured over the course of the school year breaks down, invaded by that most horrible of horribles--the substitute. The rapport that the classroom teacher has established with her class over time is missing. Learning suffers; the students suffer--though frequently not in silence as the noise level in the classroom markedly increases in volume under the less effective auspices of the substitute. As Sarah works with those of her students who are with in the individual or small group setting, she hears the increased volume of sound coming from her classroom. "Oh my. I wonder what's going on in there. Just listen to that. They aren't settling down very well, are they?" Sarah is caught on the horns of a dilemma--which of her students need her the most? How can she be in two places at the same time--simultaneously in the classroom, working with all of her students, and in the computer lab, working with those students who need extensive one-to-one assistance in order to produce their writing assessment portfolios. In this instance, the threat of sanctions has caused instruction to become distorted. Successfully teaching to the test has become a matter of survival for Sarah's school. This is highstakes assessment at its worst, misshaping the instruction policymakers would have it reform.

There seem to be two diametrically opposed ways of thinking about portfolios by the currently acknowledged experts cited in this paper. Ranged on one side are those who view portfolios as the creative work of students, owned by the students and evaluated by students in collaboration with the classroom teacher. This approach to student assessment necessitates radical change in the ways teachers design classroom instruction. It is viewed as a bottom up or grass roots curriculum transformation movement. Those who promote portfolios for highstakes

assessment purposes believe that these creative products can be squeezed, poked, prodded and quantified into standardized tests that will cause a transformation in instructional practice imposed from the top down.

Although the form of assessment may be different, standardized assessment seems to be alive and well. It has simply taken on a different guise. Rather than filling in bubbles and writing single words in blank lines, students now produce narratives, persuasive pieces, poetry, and other literary forms on demand. The Kentucky Department of Education has hooked its highstakes assessment bandwagon to alternative assessment, using the results to reward and sanction schools. This approach is apparently working in Sarah Warren's fourth grade classroom. However, it appears to be working in a distorted fashion. Once again, assessment is driving instruction. Questions must be raised regarding the direction in which this vehicle seems to be headed. This new kind of assessment has the potential to become as perverse as the former practice of teaching to the standardized tests we've all come to know and dread.

A very limited number of studies have been done that examine the implementation of writing portfolios, and more specifically, writing assessment portfolios, in the classroom and their effect on change in teacher instructional practice. There needs to be follow-up research in this area. The apparent disparity between the two very different views of the purpose of portfolios, discussed earlier in this paper, must be explored more extensively At this point in time, there seem to be many interpretations of portfolio by different people in different contexts. This hinders conversation about portfolios. Some consensus regarding definitions for different kinds of portfolios needs to be reached.

The language frequently used in the context of education reform, while not specifically addressed in this paper, also needs to be explored. What does the phrase, "empowering teachers" mean? What does it mean to "give students ownership of their writing"? If the creative writing students produce is already their intellectual property, how can they be "given ownership"? Who determines signs of ownership? Are these signs superficial or constructed--such as the portfolio storage strategy I observed and initially misconstrued as a teacher orchestrated sign of student ownership of portfolios? Is this another construct invented by adults and imposed on children?

Inter-reader reliability and the scoring of assessment portfolios certainly offer fertile ground for further study. Highstakes assessment and the dissonance between its stated intent and the interpretation of that intent in relation to implementation in the classroom is another area that needs to be explored more extensively. Who are the stakeholders in the state mandated assessment process other than teachers, students, schools, school districts, and state departments of education? As reform grows more monolithic, it becomes big business. For instance, Advanced Systems has become a stakeholder in Kentucky due to its involvement with developing the KIRIS assessments and scoring processes. The list of stakeholders becomes staggering.

What effect does each of these stakeholders have on the overall impact of education reform in the state?

What about the most important stakeholders, the ones who have seem to have little or no voice in this process and yet are most significantly affected--what about the children in these classrooms? Who hears their voice? How does the state reconcile its public stance regarding student ownership of the writing assessment portfolios with its coopting of that ownership in a variety of ways, repeatedly telling students that they are the owners of their work--within certain limitations imposed by the state? How has highstakes assessment affected instruction in the classroom? Sarah's students certainly didn't relish having a substitute teacher one day every week beginning in November and carrying through until the writing assessment portfolios were completed the following March. They repeatedly demonstrated, or voiced, their discomfort through an increase in inappropriate behaviors each week when the substitute took over the class. Is this the kind of improved classroom instruction the framers of KERA intended, or has standardized assessment and increased test scores once again become the purpose of instruction, with learners and their products the means to the end, rather than learners and their learning the primary end in and of itself?

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